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Invitation to Vernacular Architecture: a Guide to the Study of Ordinary Buildings and Landscapes

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University of North Dakota but also new rivers. They settled into the basement apartment they called the "Cave" and began their explorations of the Red River of the North. A sleepy, slow, northward-flowing river, the Red leads a predominantly docile life. However, in the spring of 1997, following a winter marked by eight blizzards and more than 100 inches of snow, the quiet Red sprang to life, leaving Varley and her husband to fill sandbags, place them near the roaring river, and then flee the city.

This, however, is not a tale of disaster and devastation so much as it is a celebration of human discovery of landscapes, riverscapes, and self. The text is lyrical, almost poetic, blending the public and the private, the pain and the pleasures inherent in a struggle for self-definition (both the author's and the city's). A hint of Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*, another disaster story of monstrous proportions, pervades the text; chapters alternate, intertwining to illustrate loss and gain.

As one who experienced the flood firsthand, I can only celebrate Jane Varley's ability to capture the lessons of 1997, and encourage others to do the same.

Invitation to Vernacular Architecture: A Guide to the Study of Ordinary Buildings and Landscapes, by Thomas Carter and Elizabeth Collins Cromley. Vernacular Architecture Studies Series. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2005. xxv, 120 pp. Illustrations, bibliographical references, index. \$19.95 paper.

Reviewer Mary Anne Beecher is associate professor of interior architecture at the University of Oregon. Her publications include "Building for 'Mrs. Farmer': Published Farmhouse Designs and the Role of the Rural Female Consumer" (1999).

The American landscape is filled with ordinary buildings that have much to say about the people, place, and times they encapsulate. Thomas Carter and Elizabeth Collins Cromley's new book provides an effective framework for documenting and studying such buildings. It is a concise and focused analysis of the research methods available to individuals who are interested in investigating common buildings. The book's contents include a discussion of definitions of vernacular architecture, an enumeration of methods for investigating and documenting buildings, and an overview of significant recent scholarship that provides a range of models for interpreting the vernacular built environment. It concludes with a useful and synthesizing example of how the investigation of seemingly anonymous buildings can offer rich lessons about the cultures with which they are associated. In fact,

the authors' cogent perspective on the significance of vernacular architecture as a manifestation of cultural values and beliefs may be the text's most important contribution.

Invitation to Vernacular Architecture is clearly written, logically arranged, and well illustrated. It will prove extremely valuable to students of the built environment and to persons who are novices to the practice of architectural research. Carter and Cromley make a compelling case for the relevance of material culture studies as an approach to documenting the history of an everyday landscape that is often undervalued. The methods they articulate fill a longstanding need for a means of defining buildings that don't fit high-style-based frameworks of analysis. Historians of the midwestern vernacular landscape will find this book a valuable resource.

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